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COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Beginning a series of seven talks by Ava Boman

We are beginning today a series of broadcasts on the subject of Comparative Religion. We do this for a special reason. It seems possible that we might, you and I, by exploring together the religious convictions of our fellowmen, scattered over the world, draw closer to them.

Mankind plunges from one catastrophe to another for lack of an inclusive world-wide view. We need desperately to know what common ground exists among us. We need it fully as much in the realm of idea, the realm of spirit, as in the realm of economics or of industry, or of the military.

It was in anticipation of such critical needs as face our 20th Century that The Theosophical Society in the 19th Century declared one of its objects to be the formation of a nucleus of human brotherhood, and another to be a comparative study of the religions and philosophies of man.

So we should like, first of all, to present the theosophical view that, although each religion is unique in itself, it is also a partial - and vital - expression of the total Wisdom Religion of humanity; that all the great religions stem from one common divine Source; and that all have a common purpose --to further the spiritual evolution of mankind.

A study of the religions reveals quite soon that there is common ground among them. Prayer is common to all religions under the sun. But before there can be prayer there must be faith in some Divine Reality to Whom prayer is addressed. That faith, too, is common to all religions. So also are the ethical teachings which make altruism the ideal and self-centeredness its enemy, make love the ideal and indifference its enemy.

There are those who believe that religion, as a whole, grew out of the fears and superstitions of primitive people. Theosophy prefers the view that even most primitive man was taught by Beings far greater than himself, far ahead of him in evolution. Such great Beings were the Founders of religions, were the mythical "divine kings", were leaders who helped establish cultures which young humanity could not have developed without such aid.

New students of comparative religion are always amazed to discover how much common ground there is in the various religions of the world. Not in the observances and not in the details, but in the fundamentals. All without exception give guidance to man for his moral life and for the developing of his spiritual qualities. And every one points out to its devotees a way to Reality, or union with the Divine, whether it be called the Way of the Cross, or Yoga, or the Tao, or the Path of Return. Names do not matter. Ideas do.

Theosophy is not a religion; it is a search for truth, truth which may be found in religious experience, in the realm of idea, or in the laws of Nature. For this reason there are in our Society Christian theosophists, Jewish theosophists, Buddhist theosophists, Hindu theosophists, Moslem theosophists, and so on through all the religions of the world, making a network of people in every religion who give reverence to all religions, and scoff at none.

Dr. Annie Besant, late president of The Theosophical Society and a deep student of the religions, wrote: "While it is true that every religion contains some universal teachings, each is dominated by a spirit peculiar to itself. Each religion has its own note, is marked by a dominant quality, or seems to have selected one virtue on which to lay special stress; and all these notes do not sound a monotone, but a splendid chord when heard together." This makes it clear that while the similarities among religions are important, their differences are likewise important.

It may be interesting in this light to review the chief world religions, seeking the dominant note in each and the civilization which it accompanies. Beginning with our own, we are aware that Christianity has sounded the note of individualism and of loving self-sacrifice, particularly for the Europeans and Americans. Prior to Christianity, Judaism sounded the note of righteousness, by which was meant obedience to divine and moral law. This note was stressed first in the homeland of the Jews in the Near East and later in the many lands to which this wandering race took its culture.

Mohammedanism was designed for the great Arabian culture of a thousand years ago. Islam is the Path of Resignation, of acceptance of the destinies men are called upon to face. In this manner the Moslem is taught to seek Reality and union

with the Divine. The fact that his devotion has often led him to fanaticism should not blind us to the central idea of his faith which is Acceptance.

The Buddhist doctrine is that of wisdom and understanding, and has inspired most of the Asiatic peoples of the Mongolian, or Atlantean, race as well as the peoples of India. Those people are led to seek Reality by way of right knowledge, right understanding, and right thought.

The Zoroastrian, or Mithraic, religion of the Persian race exists still among the Parsis of India. Their chief doctrine was that of purity: Reality is to be sought by way of the pure heart and mind, through "Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds".

The Grecian doctrine of Beauty stemmed from the prehistoric Teacher, Orpheus, who has become legendary. The Greek culture which flowered under this faith is associated in our minds with the great body of geniuses who glorified the name of Greece through beauty of form and beauty of thought--Homer, Pythagoras, Plato, Pericles, Phidias, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristotle.

Confucianism and the Chinese peoples have long been synonymous. The Confucian doctrine is that of activity; Reality is to be sought in the outer world of action through self-culture which leads to the development of the "superior man". However, not all members of any race or nation are extroverts; so China has had another religion founded by Lao-tze and called Taoism. Followers of the Tao, or Way, are taught to live humbly, without ambition, and without officious interference with their neighbors. It is a doctrine of quietude and simplicity.

Among ancient religions that of Egypt was united with science and taught realization through knowledge of the physical world as an expression of Divinity. And the Hindu religion taught the immanence of God and the solidarity of man.

It is good to list these basic aims of each of the World Religions for we see thus that none is antagonistic to any other, but rather that each supplements the others. Many thinkers have realized this and proclaimed it, hoping thereby to overcome the racial and religious prejudices which

have harassed the world.

P. Pavri, a Hindu theosophist, makes this comment: "As one white light includes all colors, so the different religions represent the varied colors which in their union form the one white Ray of Truth." And David Rhys Williams in his recent book on the Religions says: "There are enough common elements in the religions of mankind to enable the nations of the world to understand one another's system of values."

One of the elements found to be common to all religions is the moral instruction in unselfishness. It is the Golden Rule of Christianity and is taught to every Christian child: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." Long before the Christian era the Zoroastrians were admonished; "Do as you would be done by", and fully 1000 B. C. the Hindu scripture read, "The true rule in life is to guard and do by the things of others as you would do by your own." In 500 B. C. the Buddha taught: "One should seek for others the happiness one desires for oneself"; and Confucius, a contemporary of the Buddha, gave the negative side of the same teaching by saying "What you do not want done to yourself do not do to others." Judaism in 70 B.C. likewise proclaimed "What is displeasing to thyself do not do to others. This is the substance of the law. All else is commentary." And yet again in the Mohammedan Koran we find "Let none of you treat your brother in a way you yourself would dislike to be treated."

Thus have men of all races been instructed by their religions to turn away from selfishness and self-centeredness and to consider the welfare of their neighbors. Yet faith quarrels with faith, and race quarrels with race. There are, however, encouraging signs. We have only to mention the World Parliament of Religions, the Fellowship of Faiths, and the Conferences of Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Huge audiences have been inspired by the inescapable conclusion that while races may be many, humanity is one; and that while religions may be many, religious experience is one.

On our next broadcast we shall begin our study of the great religions in their historical order. We invite you to share the story of the world's oldest living religion -- Hinduism.

HINDUISM

Hinduism is the subject of this second talk in our series on comparative religion. Last week we discussed the subject in general, and this is the first of several particular religions to be studied on this program in the coming weeks. The brotherhood of humanity towards which the world is groping may well be dependent in some measure upon a brotherhood of the religions. We invite you to be with us for this full series.

In our first talk we tried to make it clear that Theosophy looks upon each of the Great Religions as a partial expression of the one Wisdom-Religion of the planet. Anyone who makes a study of comparative religion is sure to be struck by the agreement in the religions on their basic concepts despite the great variety in expression. They all, for example, proclaim the spiritual nature of man and the universe, and their common Source. Though they give different names to that Source, the belief itself is basic. They agree also that man is immortal and that he can develop virtues within himself. They give him help for such development. They agree in believing their Founder to be divine, representing on earth one of the aspects of the Deity.

Now for Hinduism. Hinduism, or Brahmanism as it is sometimes called, is probably the oldest of the surviving religions, and is the national religion of India. In Hinduism the whole civilization is viewed as religious and there is nothing in human life which is regarded as "secular" or "profane". But, at the same time, degrees of spirituality, so to speak, are recognized. There are rites and ceremonies designed especially for the masses, and there is profound philosophy for the learned. Hinduism is actually a philosophic religious system designed for the training of its devotees at every stage of their evolution, from ignorant beggar to revered yogi.

Its purpose is to give guidance not only in spiritual and intelligent life but also in the phases of human relationship. Members of the family are drawn together in the closest spiritual ties by the performance of religious ceremonies marking every family event, from prenatal life through birth, marriage and death. Special ceremonies have also been developed for instruction in the nature of the after-death life.

In fact, these two phases of Hinduism, the ceremonial and the philosophical, have built up a religion which is unique in its freedom of thought combined with orthodoxy of action.

The philosophical aspect of the religion is based on the concept of the unity of all life. Hindus believe that Brahman can neither be described nor debated, but that a spark of the life of Brahman, or God, permeates every form from mineral to human and superhuman. Therefore the Hindu seeks to dispel the illusion of difference and to realize for himself that, in the words of Alexander Pope, "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, whose body Nature is and God the Soul."

From their scriptures we may quote this: "Manifest, near, dwelling verily in the heart, is the great Brahman; on Him is founded all that moves, breathes, and closes the eyes." As is typical of Hinduism, this truth is also put into words for the simple peasant, as you can see from another sentence of its scriptures: "As butter in the milk is brought forth by churning, as salt in the water in which it is dissolvedso is Brahman concealed as the Self in every creature."

It is because the Hindu sees God, Brahman, as the one Life everywhere and in everything that we find the Hindu people reverent of all life and careful of all creatures, however insignificant. And because they think of Brahman as a Trinity whose work on earth is carried out by a host of lesser Beings they have created many sculptures and paintings which represent attributes of the Supreme Deity manifesting in Nature. These are mistakenly thought of as idols. Rather, they are reminders.

No discussion of the national religion of India would be complete without mention of the caste system which has prevailed for centuries. As originally designed, it was an integral part of the religious teaching. To understand this, it is important to know that Hinduism includes a belief in spiritual evolution, which means growth of the soul, or spiritual nature from simple to complex, from ignorance to wisdom, and from futility to power and dignity. In other words, from a young soul to a mature soul by way of reincarnation. The philosophy of spiritual growth was for long centuries esoteric. But the caste system was its exoteric expression in the social structure where all could see it, however uninformed.

Let us see how that would work out. The lowest caste was originally the Shudra or servant class, in which the young soul learns obedience and the way of service in little things. The next caste was the Vaishya or merchant class in which could be learned unselfishness in the use of wealth, and the way of service by providing. The third caste was the Kshatriya or warrior class in which the growing soul learns the way of service by protection of others, even to the laying down of life. The fourth caste was the Brahmin or teaching class. This was planned to include the wiser, adult souls who had attained to wisdom, and could best serve by teaching and healing.

Originally there were but these four castes. Only later, very much later, were there added the Untouchables whose work was the lowest form of labor, and, at the other end of the scale the Sannyasi, or Holy Man, who is considered to be beyond caste, who uses no ceremonies, and who possesses nothing.

It was not originally intended that caste should be hereditary. But as men add to or subtract from the original teachings of their religion, the pure meaning is lost. And social pressures are often very great.

The most sacred scriptures of Hinduism are the very ancient Vedas, or Books of Wisdom. They contain teachings which had been handed down orally for hundreds of centuries. Their antiquity is attested by the archaic form of Sanskrit in which they are written. Mme. Blavatsky wrote in THE SECRET DOCTRINE that "the poems of the Rig Veda are deeply interesting for the history of the human mind, belonging as they do to a much older phase than the poems of Homer and Hesiod."

Some of the Vedic Hymns are esoteric and some exoteric. Both are considered "revelations". Commentaries upon the esoteric hymns are called the Upanishads and are among the noblest of religious writings. Another literary gem which Hinduism has given the world is the Bhagavad Gita. Though it is part of the great epic poem, the Mahabharata, it contains discussions upon the highest spiritual philosophy and is recognized as one of the most beautiful scriptures to be found in religion. There is an exquisite English version of it written by Dr. Annie Besant, onetime international President of the Theosophical Society. And there is a poetical version called

THE SONG CELESTIAL by Sir Edwin Arnold. We recommend these for your reading.

Attempts to make this mighty Hindu philosophy clear to the intellect of the Hindu people of all types have given birth to the Six Schools of Indian philosophy. All six Schools agree on the objective of seeking Liberation and the divine knowledge which is needed for that Liberation; but they differ in their ideas about the method of reaching it. Two of the Schools are developed along the idea of pure reason and are founded on the atomic theory. Two other Schools, headed respectively by Patanjali and Kapila, are based on the duality of the universe--love and hate, good and evil, and so on--and their interplay. And two Schools are concerned with the way of the religious life, one exoteric and one esoteric - the Vedanta which is best known in the West.

As the flower of each of these schools of thought, there is Yoga. The Yogi, "one who practices Yoga", is much misunderstood in the West. The true Yogi is one who has dedicated his life to the attainment of conscious spiritual union with the Divine. Since the goal of the Hindu religion is to unite one's consciousness with the Supreme, with Brahman, it follows naturally that the holy man who spends his life in the practice of Yoga is deeply revered.

In India several types of Yoga have been developed and practiced. Among these are Karma Yoga, or the way of Union by activity; Bhakti Yoga, which is the way of Union through devotion; Jnana Yoga, which is the Yoga of wisdom; Hatha Yoga which is the Yoga of physical discipline; and Raja Yoga, called the princely Yoga, which includes the prime features of them all.

All these are means by which a Hindu who, in previous lives, has passed through the various schools of philosophy and the many religions of mankind, may now proceed to his Liberation, his Salvation.

Such--briefly put, of course--is the religion of Hinduism handed down from immemorial antiquity as a religion beautifully adapted to the philosophical and metaphysical Hindu mind.

Next week we shall talk about Buddhism, the religion founded by Gautama Buddha, the Prince Siddartha, himself a Hindu.

BUDDHISM

Today our subject is Buddhism, the religion with the largest following in the world. In fact, it is believed that before Communism swept religions aside in some of the countries one third of the world population followed the teachings of the Buddha.

Apparently it was not the intention of the Lord Buddha to found a new religion. Rather it has been thought that his hope was to reform Hinduism, the religion into which he had been born. But one gathers, after a study of the life of the Buddha and his teachings, that he was moved by a much deeper purpose. In fact it seems important to study his life and teachings together because of the close links between them.

The Buddha was born a Hindu prince. His personal name was Siddartha and the family name was Gautama. Hence the eventual title "Gautama Buddha". In the years of his youth and early married life he was surrounded with every form of luxury and beauty; nothing ugly or unpleasant was allowed to reach him. So when he came face to face, for the first time in his life, with sorrow, physical pain, old age and disease his compassionate nature was profoundly moved. Driven by a spiritual unrest he quietly left home, determined to find the cause, and if possible the cure, for the sufferings of men.

He spent six years in this search. For two of those years he sought the answers from the great recluses of India, and from the mysteries of Indian philosophy; but his conclusion was: "Not by intellect alone will the cure of sorrow come." For another two years he lived among ascetics, practicing penances and austerity until he fell helpless and worn out; and his conclusion was: "Not by denial of the common needs will the cure of sorrow be found." After that he spent two years in solitude. There he found the "Middle Way" which became an important part of his later doctrine, the way which lies between the extremes of all sorts, between fanaticism and indifference, between ascetism and self indulgence. There is a middle way between the extremes of conduct which leads to inner harmony and peacefulness.

But the supremely great outcome of those years of solitude and meditation upon the sorrows of the world was his own Liberation. It was at this time that the title of "Buddha",

"the Enlightened One" was accorded him. He began his ministry so recognized in the year 528 B.C. He was 35 years old.

He proclaimed first the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Middle Way. Here they are, very simply put into English. The First Truth is that sorrow is more prevalent in human life than happiness. The Second is that all misery arises from craving for sensation, for experience, for life. The Third is that each man can, by his own efforts, without the help of priest or scripture, put an end to the craving, the desires which cause misery. And the Fourth Noble Truth is the Way, the Path of Holiness, so called, the Way which leads to the end of misery. It is the Path or Middle Way on which are practiced the eight virtues of Right Intention (or Viewpoint), Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Realization.

The Buddha claimed no revelation from above nor did he speak as a prophet. He talked to men of things he himself had experienced. Having discovered basic truths about the nature of human existence and the cause of misery, he spent the remaining 45 years of his life travelling through northern India bringing to his fellowmen and to his disciples his message of freedom from life's bondage and sorrow, and the way to understanding. "Let understanding be the law" said the Buddha.

"Some students of Buddhism fancy that it is merely an ethical system founded wholly on reason and capable of being grasped in its entirety by the unspiritual. Yet there is this word of the Buddha himself to consider: 'I have penetrated this doctrine which is profound, difficult to perceive and understand, which brings quietude of heart, which is exalted, which is unattainable by reasoning alone, which is intelligible only to the wise in spirit'." (Four Great Religions: Besant) Certainly, Buddhism is a profound religion. It is also a "system of wonderful ethics couched in most beautiful and poetical language, coupled with rare liberality of thought and constant appeal to reason." (Ibid)

The Buddha's view of the social order and his understanding of the personal problems connected with man's spiritual life proved vital to the people of many lands besides his own. From the beginning of the 3rd Century B.C. the spread of

Buddhism in all directions was remarkable-- to Ceylon, to Burma, Siam and Cambodia, to China and Tibet, where its influence was enormous, and on to Japan and Korea. In very recent years Buddhist Temples have been established in Europe and in the United States.

The essential teachings of Buddhism are contained in the Tripitakas, the three Pitakas, meaning literally "baskets". The first Pitaka contains all the rules for the monastic order (of the yellow robed monks) which Gautama Buddha established as the guardian and repository of his teachings. It is more mystical than the other Pitakas. The second contains the ethical teachings for the people--the Sutras--with discussions, questions and arguments about them, and also explanations arising from his experiences in daily living. The third Pitaka contains the pure Buddhist philosophy apart from the ethics. This is little known in the West.

Obviously, the second is the one which has the most popular appeal and is the one which can be most readily studied. In it are discussed the problems of self-centered desire, which is the root-cause of suffering. To select just one small example, he mentioned two misconceptions which lead to unhappiness: one, the feeling that a man must protect his own rights at the expense of others; and two, that he must continually add to his possessions or station in life. These states of mind lead to jealousy, ill will and resentment, and therefore to suffering. For this reason the Buddha stressed the Law of Karma which reveals that absolute justice rules the world. He saw that when men fully realized that their lot in life resulted from their own acts - in this or former lives - they would lose their resentment and their jealousy.

His Eightfold Path is in itself a code of ethics. Let us consider it. First Right Intention, or Right Point of View. Is that not another way of saying "Use wise discrimination"? And it follows that right thinking will lead to right speech and action. The next point, Right Means of Livelihood, is arresting for a westerner. There are major implications there, when viewed religiously, since rightness in getting a living excludes the exploitation or deception of people. By Right Effort the mind becomes resolute in the quest for Truth. And when combined with Right Concentration, Meditation and Realization, it brings the aspirant to the state of positive peace, which the Buddhist calls Nirvana.

Nirvana is probably the most misunderstood concept of Buddhism. We in the West are prone to think of it as extinction or a "state of nothingness". But every scholar who has visited India, China and Japan is well aware that it means nothing of the kind. The Buddhist system of thought gives definitions both positive and negative. Negatively, Nirvana is "the annihilation of everything connected with the physical plane". Positively, Nirvana is "the highest state of spiritual bliss, absorption of the spirit into Universal Spirit while preserving individuality."

One of the Buddha's great objectives was the restoration of the caste system to its original spiritual reason for being. He said that a Brahmin without the qualities of a Brahmin was like "an elephant of wood and an antelope of leather" the mere outward appearance of the thing and not the reality.

The Buddha sent out his yellow robed disciples to spread his own teachings and to reaffirm the ancient Hindu faith. A vast, profound and beautiful literature of Buddhism was developed by his disciples. But let us close with a few quotations from the Buddha himself.

"If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him."

"Be wise", said the Buddha, "wiser than desire."

"Desire carries man along like a helpless log in a stream."

"Evil can only be put an end to by its opposite good. Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome the greedy by liberality; let him overcome the liar by truth."

And finally, "Hatred ceaseth not by hatred; hatred ceaseth only by love."

500 disciples stood around the Lord Buddha at his death; and to them he spoke his final words: "Work out your salvation with diligence." And so we leave Him who has been called the greatest Hindu - Gautama Buddha.

THE RELIGIONS OF CHINA

In this fourth talk of our series on Comparative Religion we are turning to the religions of China. The largest country in the world, China the fabled Cathay - with a quarter of the world's population - has for the past several years been withdrawn behind her Bamboo Curtain. We can hardly guess what effect the current fervor for Communism may be having upon the religions which have been shaping Chinese culture for twenty five centuries.

China has been called "the sea which salts all rivers that flow into it". Whoever has conquered China has become Chinese. So it is possibly not unrealistic to imagine that what will emerge a generation hence may be simply a new system of thought grafted onto that which remains essentially Chinese. Therefore it might serve us well to give thoughtful consideration to the demands laid upon the Chinese by their religious life.

Not for nothing has China lived all these centuries under the guiding spiritual force of three of the world's great Teachers: first the gentle Laotzu from whose ministry there developed the philosophy and later the religion of Taoism; then the Lord Buddha whose religion we discussed last week; and third the statesman-sage Kung-fu-tzu known to us as Confucius. At the time of their appearance on the scene 600 years before Christ, the religion of China was Shintoism, an elaborate form of magic and omens. There were no ethical teachings of any consequence, and the public worship was conducted by state officials. Small wonder that the impact of those spiritual giants, Laotzu and Confucius, was so marked.

Laotzu was the mystic. Confucius was the man of affairs. Laotzu was concerned with theology, Confucius with propriety; Laotzu with God and Confucius with man. Laotzu tried to show his fellowmen the nature of God, the quiet, steady Creative Principle which he called Tao. Confucius tried to teach his fellowmen how to elevate their character and their government. Together they represented two phases of the Wisdom-Religion, the inner and the outer.

Laotzu was for many years keeper of the secret archives and the royal library at the court of Chow in the province of Honan. Possibly it was this life of quietude and study which

developed his love of simplicity and the quiet life. At any rate, it has been said that he was the first of the Chinese scholars to have a vision of Ultimate Reality and the life of the spirit. The story goes that when, in his old age, he prophesied the downfall of Chow he was banished. As he was leaving the borders he fell into long conversation with the customs officer who begged him to write down the essence of his teaching before leaving them. This he did, putting into the form of sonnets his conception of the Way of the Spirit, the Tao and its Power. That book was the classic Tao Teh King. Putting it into the hands of the officer, Laotzu wandered away into the great unknown never to be heard of again.

The real beginnings of Taoism lie with Laotzu, "the venerable Philosopher", because it was at first a philosophy. Taoist elements of thought lie at the base of the Chinese characteristics of patience, reserve, peacefulness and contentment. It was not until 650 years later that Taoism was declared a state religion, with a rich literature developed by disciples of Laotzu. In the 13th century Kublai Khan, the first Mongol Emperor, confirmed Taoism as a state religion and conferred hereditary nobility upon its popes.

Strangely enough, the influence of the Taoist religion upon China has not been as strong as the influence of the Taoist philosophy. So let us turn for a moment to the book, the Tao Teh King, and read a few lines in translation. There are these in praise of humility:

"Standing upon the mountain steep how low the valley seems!

And yet because it lies so deep it gathers all the streams.

The valley-spirit cannot fall because it lies so low:

And yet it is the base of all, and to it all things flow."

And the little book closes with the lines:

"This is the Tao of Heaven which penetrates but does not harm.
This is the Tao of the wise man who acts but does not strive."

The philosophy of the Tao was well established by the time that merchants and scholars began to bring in from India the teachings of the Buddha by word of mouth. In fact, Buddhism blended so easily with the Taoism of the time that substantially all the very early leaders of Chinese Buddhism were Taoist scholars. It has at various times been difficult to say whether Buddhism in China was more Buddhist or Taoist in its philosophy. Truly China puts its mark on all that enters China.

What a rich period the 6th century B.C. proved to be for that country, despite its degeneracy. It calls to mind certain lines from a Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita: "Whenever righteousness decays and unrighteousness is lifted up, then I Myself come forth to protect the good and destroy the evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness." These words mean that spiritual wisdom is given new impetus in times of true need. And the Sage, Confucius, joined with the saintly Laotzu in giving the world such a new spiritual impetus. As the Buddha was doing in India. As Pythagoras was doing in Greece.

Confucius, born just 52 years after Laotzu and 17 years after the Buddha, devoted his life to government and to teaching. During his youngmanhood his three years of mourning for his mother, as prescribed by custom, was for him a period of meditation and contemplation. "He emerged from this period dedicated to the purpose of reforming his country and turning the eyes of its rulers back to the glorious examples set by the wise Emperors and law-givers of ancient days. His teaching stood firmly on the basis of China's immemorial culture; but he added something which was peculiarly his own. The ancient rulers, noble as they were, had had little concern for the masses. Confucius taught that rulers had a responsibility to those they governed to rule them well and protect them." (Greenlees)

As a teacher he was unique in that period. Modern educators would surely be interested in one statement of his. It was: "The capacity to name the rivers of Asia in clockwise direction forms no part whatever of true education..... The true field of education is to draw men from the qualities of the ordinary man to the qualities of the superior man."

Some have said that Confucianism is non-theistic, is more of a moral code of living than a religion. Yet Confucius has been deified and worshipped; and his teachings have become a religion in a true sense. They show a way of life which points to the straight path of goodness. And they hold out to men a way of self-perfection by which they may come to "live in the eternal and abide in that undying Poise which is the final secret".

Yet the doctrine of Confucius is not a doctrine of perfection. Rather it is a doctrine of betterment. Any person

may learn from the Classics of Confucius what remains for him to do to improve his character. Here are just a very few of the hints given by Confucius. "The ordinary man is hard to serve; the superior man is easy to serve." "The ordinary man is troubled and restless; the superior man is calm and peaceful." "The ordinary man takes pride even in low position; the superior man takes no pride in position." "The ordinary man thinks of the profits he can make; the superior man thinks of justice and obedience to the law." And so on through all the phases of human potentials.

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell, who lived for several years in China wrote that the Confucian system has succeeded in producing "a whole nation possessed of exquisite manners and perfect courtesy..... It is not confined to one class; it exists even in the humblest coolies. It is humiliating to watch the brutal insolence of white men received by the Chinese with a quiet dignity which cannot demean itself to answer rudeness with rudeness. Europeans often regard this as weakness but it is really strength, the strength by which the Chinese have conquered all their conquerors."

Confucius was centuries ahead of his time as statesman and as democrat. "It says much for the power of his ideas that unwelcome as they were to the self-seekers of his day, his ideal became the doctrine of state for a fifth of humanity through the 25 centuries that have passed since his time."

At the age of 72 Confucius called together 70 of his chosen pupils in the lovely valley where the State had granted him a home. There, on the summit of a holy hill, he gave them his last advice, saying "Look into your heart, each one of you, and find what special talent you have been given by Heaven. Train that and use it for the good of others."

So died Confucius, man of affairs, among his disciples. So died Laotzu the mystic, alone and unknown. And Ming-tau, known to us as Mencius the "St. Paul" of Confucius, wrote 200 years later: "The actions of saints are not all alike. Some step aside into retreat" (as did Laotzu) "while others come forward into power" (as did Confucius); "some withdraw from the kingdom while others stay there. But they all have the aim to make themselves pure, free from every stain. The saints belong to the way of Heaven."

JUDAISM

Our previous talks on Comparative Religion have been concerned with those living religions whose origin lies in the orient, in Asia. Today we turn to that other great birth-place of religions, the Near East, and to a study of the oldest of the Palestinian religions - Judaism, the religion of the Jews.

The Bible's Old Testament is the great "elder monument" of Judaism as it is of Christianity. In the Old Testament we find the story of the religion of Israel from which Judaism descended. In it we also find the story of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, who lived about 3,500 years before Christ. And the story of Moses, the Lawgiver, who led his people "out of Egypt and out of the house of bondage" about 1,500 years B. C. The Old Testament stands among the magnificent scriptures of the world. The Psalms of David and the exhortations of the Prophets are Jewish but they are loved and revered by Christians and Mohammedans as well. Listen --

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." And these simple words of the Prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

None of those revered teachers, nor any other, has ever been looked upon by the Jews as a "divine incarnation". Judaism recognizes no being as a "Mediator", a "Son", or a final interpreter of God. Every Jew feels a direct and personal communion with God. A Jew can judge himself according to the degree of his understanding of God's Law, and is expected to do so. His relationship with God is personal, and is based on those commands written in Deuteronomy 6:5 - "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength" and in Leviticus 19:18 - "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Since Jesus of Nazareth called these the first and second command-

ments, saying "On these hang all the law and the prophets", I think it is safe to assume that many people consider them the Christian commandments. They are that, certainly; but we remember that they are also Jewish commandments, and that Jesus was a Jew of the sect of the Essenes, a monastic order within Judaism.

More than one Jewish historian has written that the Jews would have accepted the teaching of Jesus but for the fact that they could never accept nor understand the idea of the Trinity -- "God the Father, God the Son (referring to Jesus the Christ) and God the Holy Ghost." To them the idea of Trinity was a denial of their basic belief in Unity, the Oneness, of God. The central prayer of Judaism is the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One". It is also the last prayer - preferably the last words - of a dying Jew, "The Lord our God is One." For that reason Judaism has, while respecting Jesus, denied acceptance of his divinity; and while respecting Mohammed, denied acceptance of him as the Last Prophet. Judaism has most certainly had its great leaders, both spiritual and intellectual, but these leaders are acknowledged as great Jews. Nothing more.

Perhaps you may wonder what it is that unites them in such close bonds of religious loyalty if they acclaim no divine or semidivine leader. And I think we may safely say that it is their sense of a special covenant with the Supreme Deity. This covenant was proclaimed to them long centuries ago in the words: "I shall be their God and they shall be My people". This covenant lays upon the Jews the twin obligations of loyalty and of understanding. They feel that if they are to stand before the world as people chosen of God they must know His Will and His Way. Therefore it is the Law which is preeminent. The Great Law, which they call the Torah, the Law of Moses, includes not only the Ten Commandments but also the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), books whose authorship was at one time attributed to Moses. A copy of this Mosaic Law, the Torah, is always kept in a twin scroll on the wall of the Synagogue which faces Jerusalem. The scroll is Judaism's sacred symbol.

Another unifying force in Judaism is the family ritual. Since the rabbis of Judaism are teachers and leaders but not priests in the sense of dispensers of grace, or absolution,

or unction, many religious rituals are observed in the home. The male head of the family conducts them. These rituals, based as they are on events in Jewish history, keep alive the historical sense of purpose as well as faith in the strength of their own people. And, adapted as the rituals are to the Jews' own culture and tradition, they have a deep emotional strength.

The most popular Jewish ritual is the Feast of the Passover. It combines a lovely springtime ceremonial in the home with treasured family associations and hallowed national memories. For this observance families gather from near and far. "Even the prodigal, the cynic, the skeptic" returns for the joyful preparations and for the solemn ritual. They call the Passover "the season of our freedom" since it recalls ancient divine intercessions which freed their people, and commemorates the great Exodus from Egypt.

Quite different is the Feast of Purim which is based on the colorful story of Esther. This is the gayest of rituals, with games and noise-makers for the children, and, for the elders, feasting, gladness and the sending of gifts. You may remember how vividly some of the rituals are portrayed in the novel "Marjorie Morningstar".

The Jewish New Year begins in the early fall, ushering in a ten day period of penitence. The New Year is regarded not as an occasion for carousing but for spiritual stock-taking. Because of the Jew's personal sense of responsibility to his God, these penitential days are known as The Days of Awe. They culminate in the Fast of Yom Kippur. "The Kol Nidre chant of Yom Kippur is the most stirring, haunting melody in the entire religious experience of the Jews and recalls to them the centuries of persecutions they have known." Thus we see how history, religious faith, and family ties combine to make the rituals of Judaism a powerful binding force in Jewish lives.

Jewish history is starred with great names. In philosophy, in science, in music, in finance and philanthropy Jews have been world figures. But within the fold of their religion no name stand higher than that of Maimonides, the physician-poet-philosopher of the 12th Century. He has been called the second Moses. His great work was the organization and systematizing of the vastness of Jewish Law, both written and

unwritten, into a reference book for rabbis, judges and laymen. While no Jew has ever been called upon to accept the thirteen fundamental principles which he formulated - since Judaism has no creed - those principles of Maimonides have dominated Jewish thought ever since. They also exerted a profound influence upon the Christian Scholastics, especially Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas.

The greatest division in Judaism was made in the 19th century in Germany under the leadership of Rabbi Moses Mendelssohn. He believed that, in view of the greatly improved social-economic situation of the modern free Jew, certain concessions must be made in the interest of practical coexistence. What is more, the Jews who agree with him have made the concessions and are living by them. They are known as Reform Jews. Other Jews are convinced that no compromise should be made with the Gentile way of life into which they have been freed, and that their strength will continue to be, as it has always been, in abiding by the Torah, the firm base of Jewish Law. They are known, quite naturally, as Orthodox Jews. As a sort of halfway house between the two schools of thought stands the group known as Conservative Jews. There is a growing feeling among many Jews of whatever group that much of the law of Judaism is law which now belongs to the State, the government.

In purely religious law there is no change. Belief continues firm in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the assurance of a future life, and the importance of a charitable and kindly personal life on earth. We may well close this brief sketch of the religion of the Jews with the Olenu prayer which is recited in their services:

"May the time not be distant, O God, when Thy name shall be worshipped in all the earth, when unbelief shall disappear and error be no more.....O may all, created in Thine image, recognize that they are brothers, so that, one in spirit and one in fellowship, they may be forever united before Thee."

CHRISTIANITY

The Theosophical Society puts forth the idea - a very old and venerable one - that human evolution proceeds according to divine plan. In that connection Theosophy shows how each civilization provides a special environment in climate, government and society which can help its members develop new capacities. And shows further how, for guidance in such development, a new religious dispensation is always provided.

Thus we observe that when the great Western civilization had its rise in the Graeco-Roman setting, there was developing at the same time in Palestine the religion which was to be its guiding star - Christianity. Theosophy offers the further explanation that the environment of the West was designed to develop eventually the mental powers of the concrete mind - analysis; and in order to protect the competitive, analytical mind from destroying itself in rivalry, the religion was one of love exemplified in the perfect life of its Founder.

As is usually the case with the Founder of a religion, the purpose of the Christ did not seem to be to create a new religion, but rather to purify and deepen the religion into which he had been born. You may remember that he said, in the Sermon on the Mount, referring to the Mosaic law of the Jews, "I am come not to destroy but to fulfill" the law. And his exhortations led again and again beyond right action to right psychological attitudes. He constantly turned the thoughts of his listeners to their inner life, the life of the spirit, saying "The kingdom of Heaven is within" -- not a kingdom of earth or of heaven above, but a spiritual power waiting in the heart of every man.

The life of the Founder of Christianity, as written in the Gospels, is familiar to and beloved by the whole Christian world. And, strangely enough, that is all that is known about his life except for the tradition in India that he taught there as "Issu", and the rather general tradition that he was a member of the Essene sect of Judaism. But the Gospels themselves, written between 65 and 125 A.D., make no mention of the years between the 12th and 30th of Jesus' life. They do portray, however, the ministry of love and the life of pure holiness which, though the ministry lasted but three years, changed the course of Western history and culture.

Many have wondered why Christianity was born in Palestine instead of in the heart of the Roman world. Why not in Rome, why not in Alexandria where all the cultures, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Hebrew met? To begin with, Palestine was not so remote. A great trade route ran through it. However, it is agreed by many that the factor which destined Palestine to be the home of the Christ was the fervent faith of the Hebrew nation. While the Pharisees and Sadducees might be hypocritical and proud, there were other Jewish sects, Brotherhoods like the Essenes and the Therapeuts in whom a deeply mystical faith and a very true brotherhood were found. So Christianity began as a Jewish sect.

It was St. Paul who made it international. In fact, he alienated the Jewish Christians by carrying the message of Christ outside the ranks of Judaism to Greece, Asia Minor, and Macedonia. From that day to this, missionary zeal has been deeply characteristic of Christianity.

There has not been since the early Christian centuries, a philosophy to accompany the Christian religion. But many of the early Church Fathers were philosophers who blended the teachings of Christ with the best philosophical thought of the time. Among them were Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Plotinus, to name but a few of those who were called the Gnostics, or "knowers". Eusebius wrote that Origen was an expositor of the mystical tradition of the Christian Church. And it is by way of the writings of Origen that we learn that there was an esoteric Christianity which has been largely lost sight of - and which may have been its philosophy.

One thing which Origen wrote was this: "Whoever is pure even as regards the lesser transgressions, let him be boldly initiated into the mysteries of Jesus..... Let such a one hear the doctrines which were spoken in private by Jesus to his genuine disciples." This reminds us, does it not, of Jesus' own words to his disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables." (Mark 4,11) But the Gnostics were ruled out of the Church and placed under the ban of heresy. From then on, Christianity has been based on devotion and belief, devotion to its great Founder and belief in the tenets of the church or the denomination. Christian creeds have been vital in Christian history.

Augustine, the great saint of the 5th Century, was a mystic and a philosopher. He was a bridge between Gnostic thought and the "true belief" who welded the Church into its greatest unity. Full of fiery zeal for Christianity as he was, he yet knew that the search for God is universal and the religious life perennial. In that light he wrote the following: "The identical thing which we now call the Christian religion existed among the ancients and has not been lacking from the beginning of the human race until the coming of Christ in the flesh, from which time on, the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christian." (Retractationes)

St. Augustine used the whole strength of his great mind and the power of his psychological analysis to unravel the workings of our inner life, that mysterious inner world which remains an unknown territory to most human beings. The result is found in his CONFESSIONS in the marvelously subtle descriptions of what we might call the technique of the inner life, descriptions which will ever remain a guide to all aspirants.

The history of the Christian religion falls naturally into three parts. Ancient Christianity was the Graeco-Roman period which marked the firm establishment of the Church upon the so-called Pagan world. Mediaeval Christianity, from the 8th to the 16th Century, saw the Great Crusades, the establishment of monasteries over all of Europe, the growing tie between Church and State which led to the Holy Roman Empire, and the access of power of the Papacy. That period also saw, in the 11th Century, the first great schism in the Church, when the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople formally excommunicated each other.

Modern Christianity dates from the second great schism in the church, the Reformation. The Reformation was sparked by Martin Luther who was placed under the ban of the Church by Pope Leo X because he openly criticized the Pope and condemned certain ecclesiastical procedures. When the followers of Luther were put also under a legal ban, they - already called Lutherans - responded with such protest that they were dubbed the "protesters" or "protestants". The Protestants then rallied to their standards those who accepted their principle of "the inalienable right of private judgment in religion" with "the scriptures as sole authority." Western Christianity has ever since been part Roman Catholic and

part Protestant. In the centuries since, there has been a fragmentation of Christianity into more than 250 sects.

What we might call contemporary Christianity, dating roughly from the turn of the century, has shown some trend towards reunification. Many Protestant sects have merged. And only recently, the new Pope John XXIII has extended a "loving invitation" for the reunion of the Greek Orthodox Church with Rome, and the Patriarch has expressed his joy at the overture.

In contemporary Christianity there is, as in all the other World Religions at this time, a definite liberal movement. The so-called religious liberals of Christianity are devoted to "the free mind principle". Their objective seems to be "not for all to think alike, but for all alike to think". They feel that uniformity of belief is both unattainable and undesirable; and they proclaim the religion of Jesus in contradistinction to the religion about Jesus. Also there is the important development described as "a return to primitive Christianity".

Another contribution to contemporary Christian thought not to be discounted has been initiated by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Scrolls have certainly focused attention on primitive Christianity. They have also made clearer than ever before the historical fact of the development of the Essene-Christian ideal in the midst of Judaism. Whether the person of Jesus will ever be identified with the "Son of Righteousness", venerated and quoted in the Scrolls, is unsure. But the identity of ideals is very sure.

I close with these words from a Dutch theosophist, J.J. Van der Leeuw in his *DRAMATIC HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH*: "Much was known by the world to which Christ came. But the one thing that was lacking was the power to live according to the knowledge possessed. The coming of Christ gave that power.....He taught men how to live, not only by the divine words which fell from His lips but by the divine life He led. His teaching was all woven around the Kingdom of God which lies within, and He, in the crystalline perfection of a life that knew no compromise, showed the way to that Kingdom. His enemies conquered Christ in the world of matter: He allowed Himself to be conquered for only thus could He teach the supreme lesson that He came to teach -- that nothing from without can ever conquer the Spirit within."

ISLAM

Today we turn to the study of Mohammedanism -- Islam. Islam is an arabic word meaning "submission to God". An adherent of Islam is called a Moslem, which means "one who submits". And the name Saracen was applied to those Moslems who, in the Middle Ages, opposed the Christians of the Crusades. By whatever name they are called, they are all passionately devoted followers of the Prophet Mohammed and believe him to be the ultimate channel whereby the will of the Creator has been revealed to mankind. Mohammedanism, the religion of the Arab world, has also its millions of followers scattered through Africa, the East Indies, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

In the 6th Century A.D. when Arabia and Syria were at a very low ebb morally and politically, when idolatry and license were rampant, a child was born into the ruling tribe of Mecca and into a prosperous merchant family. The story goes that at his birth his mother saw a great light surrounding her and declared that her son should be named Mohammed, meaning "renowned". He seems to have been born with a sense of mission and as he attained manhood and travelled in business from city to city, seeing all the evil, his sense of mission grew. But with it, unhappily, grew a sense of inadequacy, so that he literally spent years in spiritual torment. For 15 years he took time each month for solitary meditation in the nearby desert, tortured by the opposing forces within him.

He had reached the age of 40 before revelation came to him. Then, in two different visions of blinding beauty, the Being -- whom he called the Angel Gabriel -- appeared before him teaching him and commanding him to begin his ministry as a Prophet of God. Thereupon confidence and decision swept through him. The trust of his faithful wife encouraged him. The revelations are recorded in the Koran, the "luminous book" of the new religion.

Mohammed began his ministry. But it proved to be a threat to the prosperity of idolatrous Mecca. He and his little band of 30 followers were forced to flee to Medina. That was in the year 622. And that flight, called the Hegira, marks the beginning of Islam, the year from which the Moslem world dates its calendar. In Medina the large Jewish col-

ony, prosperous and influential, had already given the people the idea of the Unity of God, the idea of revelation by Prophets, and faith in a future life, so that they were prepared for Mohammed's message. But his declaration of himself as the last of the Prophets caused Jews and Christians alike to withdraw from him.

But followers did gather around him there and he set up his theocratic state. He later conquered Mecca and destroyed the idols which were on the Kaaba, the sacred black stone of Mecca. The winning of Mecca was a turning point for him and his teachings. The Bedouins, who had little concern for a prophet, gave all their respect to a successful warrior. With Medina as headquarters and Mecca as a pilgrimage center, the position of the new religion was assured. Mohammed ruled as a divine commissioner. His people claimed no rights of self-government because Mohammed's law was God's law. They considered it a high privilege that they had a ready means of ascertaining the divine will.

In his eighth year at Medina Mohammed addressed a manifesto to the world demanding the submission of all mankind to Islam and the revealed commands of God. He was now a powerful figure calling men from idolatry and immorality, a new Prophet rekindling the flame and concentrating on himself the adoration of men. There was in him both a power and a compassion which made men face death and endure torture for his sake. When anyone asked for miracles to prove his divine mission, he answered proudly and calmly that he was but a man, not empowered to work miracles, but that the divine beauty of his message was its own evidence.

Surely the sublimity of its language and the purity of its teaching place it among the great sacred writings of the world. Every instruction in the Koran begins with the word "speak" or the word "say", indicating that the Prophet was so commanded by his divine Master. The Koran, according to orthodox Moslems, is the last of 104 divine books. Just as the law came to Moses, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Jesus, so came the Koran to Mohammed.

The work of Mohammed as head of state was tremendous. His was the master mind which united his followers in Arabia into a compact body and infused into the Moslem community a Zeal which in a few years carried its victorious armies far

and wide. He annexed both Persia and the fringes of the Roman Empire.

His religious work was still greater. He taught his followers first the Unity of God as King, Ruler, Governor of His worlds, saying "There is no God but God the living, the self-subsisting" -- Allah. Second, the holiness of the Prophets of God: over and over it is declared in the Koran that there "is no distinction between Prophets". Third, he gave them the teaching of Islam saying that all men of whatever faith who surrender themselves to God are thereby children of Islam, and that other religions are not to be quarreled with. His words are: "On the Last Day all religions will appear before God and he will explain their disagreement. Leave the disputes until the light of God illumines us."

After 22 years of ministry Mohammed planned a war with the Romans. But that was the year of his death at the age of 62. After his death his words and acts became invested with a special sanctity and an infallibility which Mohammed himself had not claimed. Islam, in the mouth of the Prophet was by no means identical with the Islam of his followers. It seems important to know what Mohammed himself said on certain points, as they are a direct challenge to later developments in his religion.

For example, he said "Infidels are the evil doers". At no time did he say that non-Mohammedans are infidels. Concerning women he said: "Verily the Muslims of either sex, devout men and devout women, chaste men and chaste women.... for them both hath God prepared forgiveness and a great reward." And regarding polygamy he said "Never take a second wife unless you can love her as much as the first and treat her with absolute equality and justice."

The successors of Mohammed were given the title "Caliph, Commander of the Faithful". The greatest of the Caliphs was Ali, beloved son-in-law of Mohammed, husband of his daughter Fatima. From Ali's reign dates the great division in Islam between the Shiah sect, which derived from him, and the Sunnite sect, which was the more orthodox and dogmatic.

Ali was a great scholar and mystic. He took as his inspiration Mohammed's words: "The ink of the scholar is more valuable than the blood of the martyr". For 100 years he and his

followers, the Shiites, studied and taught while the Sunnites fought and conquered. Universities were established in the conquered countries about the Mediterranean even as far away as Spain. They attracted the scholars of all Europe and kept alive the teaching of science and mathematics.

The Shiah sect of Ali was the seed of Sufism, which inspired the great mystic poets of Persia, notably Omar Khayyam and Jelal-al-Din. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is a noble esoteric Sufi poem completely misunderstood by its readers in the West who take it literally. The majority of Mohammedans, however, belong to the Sunnite sect. The Sunna is the supplement to the Koran and contains all the elaborations of Koranic teaching which were essential to the firm establishment of dogma for a new world religion.

Just as the Prophet ruled Medina, so after him, the Caliphs ruled the Moslem world until the 1920s, when Kemal Attaturk seems to have been moved by the same opinion that is held by the unorthodox Moslems of Pakistan, the modern rationalistic school. They complain that the ethics of Islam, based as they are on 7th century revelation, are unsuitable for 20th century civilization. They claim that the legal system of Islam is likewise an anachronism. It is difficult to estimate the extent of this thinking in contemporary Islam.

A movement which was started in the 19th century, called the Pan-Islam Movement, had for its objective the uniting of the politically disunited nations of Islam into a spiritual unity. It is well, while we are watching the political maneuvering of various Moslem states, to remember the vital sense of religion which motivates much of their turmoil. And, lest we judge these nations too quickly as "Mohammedan firebrands", may we remember these words of the Prophet himself: "Let there be no violence in religion. Invite men into the way of thy Lord by wisdom and by exhortation."

As we look back on the seven religions we have studied together in this series, we find ample justification for the loyal devotees in each, though none for fanaticism. If it be true, as Theosophists hold, that each race is given the spiritual guidance appropriate to its needs, and the Teacher to supply that guidance, we have seen in this study the working of that plan.

